

The Present and Future of the Museum

OVER THE NEXT several issues of *Expedition* I would like to discuss some ideas related to museums in the modern world. Specifically, I want to discuss how the University of Pennsylvania Museum fits within the University, the local community, and the broader international community. I want this column to be a sounding board, not only to highlight what is happening at the Museum, but also to think through the important role that museums play in the modern world.

Let me begin with some basic comments and background about the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Too often people see this museum (and many others) as a place for old objects—material from a distant past that has little relevance to the present day. I have heard many people say that we are an archaeology museum because we display material from long-dead cultures from around the world. People have this view because we have not consistently connected these materials of the past to the living present. This is something we need to do more often and this connection is what makes us a museum of archaeology and anthropology.

The Penn Museum is not just a place of dead objects or simply a repository of past cultures. It is a place of ideas about people and cultures and a place where the living present can connect to the living past.

If this can become our broad mission and vision, we can begin to articulate a clear direction. As we connect the past to the present we can begin to see the value of preserving the materials of the past. We will also see the value of presenting exhibits and including the study of past cultures in the educational curricula of K–12 students.

The critical question is how this museum fits into the mission of the University of Pennsylvania—a large educational and research institution. As part of the University, a primary component of our mission must be research. Through field research we work with our collections and with living people to tie the past to the present. It is this focus on research that makes this museum unique and places it at the cutting edge of the study of cultures. In the end, I believe the connection between the Museum and the University is critical because it makes us stronger and more intellectually focused. 🏠



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